/222 cont./

797 bury a handful of salt in a small bag. When he starts out on the
789 dangerous day the Kirghiz /Kazak/ disinters the small bag and takes it with him, believing that this will insure him against misfortune. Amulets are quite widespread, being hung both on favorite animals and on children (on the chest for boys and sometimes in the hair of little girls).

●756 From earlier paganism the Kirghiz /Kazak/ retain a belief in the baksi /bakshi/ (shaman). He is usually an old man to whom
797 they turn for the healing of sicknesses. Christianity is finding conversion among the Kirghiz /Kazak/ very difficult. The activity of the Semipalatinsk and Turgai Kirghiz /Kazak/ missions has not produced noticeable results. The preaching has had some success only among the poor people (dzhetak or baygush), for whom purely material considerations are not least important among the incentives for adopting Christianity. Cases of reconversion to Islam are not rare.

Mukanov offers another measure of the impact of Islam in his reference to the Shariat. The Shariat is technically the canonical law of Islam. Unlike the canonical law of western civilization, however, it governs the entire life of the devout Moslem, not merely his relationship to his church. The Shariat governs, in theory, the daily habits of the Moslem, prescribes whom he may or may not marry, and sets forth the entire body of social relations and controls—between master and servant, man and woman, parent and child, ruler and governed. The fact that the very existence of this body of rules of conduct is little known among the nomadic Kazakhs is of great significance. Taken in combination with other less striking bits of evidence, it points to the superficiality of the Kazakhs' adoption of Islam. Although Moslem observance and practice is everywhere more formalized in urban than in rural surroundings, for the nomadic Kazakhs it is not merely less systematic; it is also less important.

## KAZAKH FOLK RELIGIONS

At the end of the 19th century a Russian, Polarkov, traveled among the Kazakhs in the northeast of their domain, in Semirechie in the territory of the Great Horde. He learned that these Kazakhs had not seen a mullah, or Moslem cleric, until some 15 or 20 years before his travels. In the 1890's mullahs were still exceedingly rare among the Kazakhs who lived near the Chinese border. Few Kazakhs knew Moslem prayers, or if they did, only inaccurately; few knew the Koran.[1]

Because he did not overestimate the influence of Islam on the Kazakhs, Polarkov was able to supply positive details of the religions of these people. He distinguished between two layers, the remains of the old folk religion and an overlay of the new Islamic faith among the literate. The most important of the old beliefs or cults is that centered around the soul of the deceased ancestor, arvak among the Kirgiz, aurak among the Kazakhs. These ancestors represent a strong force among their living descendants and are prayed to and invoked in time of need. The ancestor cult forms an integral part of the traditional social structure of the Kazakhs, built as it is around the genealogy and the preservation of the descent line. However, according to Polarkov, the cult of ancestors was weakening under the impact of Islam on the one hand and Russian acculturation on the other.[2]

The term shamanism is often mentioned in connection with the Kazakhs. In this religion the leader, or shaman, is ecstatic, hysterical, marked by abnormal behavior (not only according to the standards of western society, but also according to his own); he is considered to be possessed by and have control over the world of the spirits, and by entering into relations with them can use them to his own will. He cures illnesses, has powers of divination, can avert misfortune and the evil eye. For many centuries he has been far in advance of western medicine by recognizing psychosomatic disorders; he concentrates on them, and so

[1] Polarkov, 1891, pp. 21-22.
[2] Ibid., pp. 23-28.

avoids ailments which his power cannot cure, such as a broken leg. The shaman generally sets himself into a state of trance, in which he projects his soul into the spirit realm and there discovers the secret cause of some human disorder, cattle plague, or whatever problem faces him. The Kazakh shaman, called bagsha, belongs to a hereditary profession. The patrilineal organization of Kazakh society is reflected in this folk religion: "The profession of bagsha is transmitted usually from father to son; this inheritance pattern bears the name of bagshylyk."[1]

This form of shamanism is widespread among the Turks and the Mongols, where the former have not been absorbed into the world of Islam, or the latter into the world of Buddhism. Kazakh shamanism is connected most intimately with the social organization of the people. The practice of animal sacrifices conducted by the shaman in the case of severe or dangerous disease, the shaman's use of the drum or tambourine (Kazakh dabyl) in his ceremonies, the passing of a shaman's spirits to his son when the shaman dies, are all part of the fabric of Turko-Mongol religion and society, just as is the cult of ancestors. However, the Kazakhs have not lived in a vacuum sealed off from the Moslem world, for they have formed part of ancient empires thoroughly Islamic in faith; the empire of Tamerlane, to which the ancestors of the Kazakhs belonged in the 14th and 15th centuries, was a Moslem empire. The bagsha's spirits are known among the Kazakhs as djinns, a Moslem term for spirits; the bagsha frequently invokes Allah, and the Arabic devil, Shaitan, is accursed and admonished.[2]

Elements of Islam have thus slipped into the folk religion of the Kazakhs, a process over which the Russians have had no control; Tsarist recognition of Islam was not needed to introduce these elements among the Kazakhs.

For an exact appraisal of the role of Islam among the Kazakhs, another ancient practice must be examined. The Kazakhs have traditionally believed in and made pilgrimages to holy places. In Central Asia one finds a vast number of such places, tombs of saints or of other holy men. These tombs, called mazar by the Kazakhs and Kirgiz, stand alone or together with several others within an earthen enclosure which forms a sacred ossuary.[3] Among devout Moslems visits to these places can even replace the pilgrimage to Mecca.

In recent years the Soviet regime has been concerned about this practice. The Party Committee of the Pavlodar Region in May 1952 called for strengthening of the natural sciences and of antireligious propaganda, with special reference to a mazar in the Bayan-Aul District, which has existed for many years. The Academy of Sciences of Kazakhstan was instructed to put an end to the legends regarding the saint in the tomb. The Academy formed a committee to visit the sepulchre and examine the matter, but the committee limited itself to inscribing certain remarks in the visitor's book beside the tomb. It was denounced by the Party for its lack of effort.[4]

[1] Castagne (27), 1930, pp. 67-73.
[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 67-73.
[3] Castagne (29), 1951, pp. 46-50.
[4] *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, 24 May 52.